Awards for Innovation in Higher Education
Frequently Asked Questions
Updated October 16, 2014

Introduction

The Committee on Awards for Innovation in Higher Education (Committee) welcomes your questions about the program, as well as any feedback you have related to its implementation. Please submit your questions and comments to innovationawards@dof.ca.gov.

The Committee approved an application package at its meeting on September 29, 2014. The application package includes application instructions and items, information about the evaluation process, information about the award selection process, and information about award levels. That document is the most definitive source of information about the Committee's expectations. The responses below are intended only to clarify decisions that have been made about implementation of the program. The application package is available at http://www.dof.ca.gov/innovationawards/.

Q1: What is the role of the Committee?

A1: Pursuant to provisions included in the Budget Act of 2014, the Committee will (1) select which campuses receive awards and the determine the amount of funds included in each of those awards and (2) approve use of the funds included in those awards based on reports submitted by the recipients.

Q2: When will the first Committee meeting be held?

A2: The Committee has met twice. The first meeting was held on Tuesday, September 16, 2014, and the second meeting was held on Monday, September 29, 2014. Meeting agendas and recordings of the meetings are available at http://www.dof.ca.gov/innovationawards/.

Q3: Can private institutions apply for awards? Can private institutions receive award funds? Are there any other awards for which private institutions may apply?

A3: The Committee hopes that private institutions will be involved in efforts to advance the state's priorities for higher education. While private institutions may not submit applications individually, private institutions may participate in applications coordinated by UC campuses, CSU campuses, or community colleges. A private institution participating in an application may receive funds if that application is selected for an award, pursuant to any agreement between the participants in the application and subject to Committee approval of the use of funds proposed by the applicant. The state has not established separate awards specifically for private institutions.

Q4: How can a campus or group applying for an award use the money if its application is selected for an award?

A4: Award winners will be required to submit reports to the Department of Finance indicating how they intend to use the funds included in those awards. The Committee is required to approve those reports before the Director of Finance may distribute funds to an award recipient.

As described on page 2 of the application package, in a section titled "Use of Award Funds," the Committee's expectation is that funds will be used for appropriate, one-time purposes that are related to one or more of the priorities of the innovation awards program: to significantly increase the number of bachelor's degrees awarded; to allow students to complete bachelor's degrees within four years after beginning higher education; and to ease transfer through the state's education system by better recognizing learning that occurs across the state's education segments and elsewhere. Winners may choose to use award funds to expand activities described in their applications or for activities that are new and different from those described in the application.

Q5: If a group submits an application that is selected for an award, how will the funds be allocated between the participants in that application?

A5: An application must be coordinated by a UC campus, a CSU campus, or a community college. Funds will be released to the institution that coordinates the application, and that institution will be responsible for distributing funds to the entities participating in the application pursuant to any agreement between the participants.

Q6: When will the application be available?

A6: The Committee approved the final application package on September 29, 2014. The application package is available at http://www.dof.ca.gov/innovationawards/.

Q7: How will the applications be evaluated and how will the amount of each award be determined?

A7: The Budget Act of 2014 specifies that the Committee shall select which campuses or groups receive awards and determine the amount of funds included in each of those awards based on the extent to which the changes described in their applications address the following criteria:

- Credibly achieve the state's priorities at a lower cost than existing policies, practices, and systems, without requiring that students pay increased tuition or fees.

- Involve broad participation by UC campuses, CSU campuses, and community colleges and by local education agencies, including school districts, county offices of education, and charter schools, and can be replicated by other campuses and groups.

- Show commitment to achieving the state's priorities, as evidenced by changes made to existing policies, practices, and systems on or after January 10, 2014; the likelihood of any planned changes; the support of faculty, students, and other individuals and groups involved in or impacted by these changes; and the ability to sustain changes over the long-term.

The application package is designed to gather comprehensive information that will help the Committee make decisions based on those criteria. The application includes 12 items grouped into the following 4 sections: Context, Innovations, Sustainability, and Evaluation. The Committee has specified the following weights for each section:

1. *Context section:* 10 percent.
2. *Innovations section:* 40 percent.
3. *Sustainability section:* 35 percent.
4. *Evaluation section:* 15 percent.

The Committee will determine award winners and award amounts. To assist the Committee with its selection process, staff will read and evaluate each application, using the weights above to generate an overall score. Each application item contains a statement about the qualities of a strong application, and those qualities will be the basis for these evaluations.

The Committee will have access to the full content of all submitted applications and will make all final decisions regarding awardees and award amounts.

Q8: When will the awards be made?

A8: The Committee will meet on March 20, 2014, and on April 27, 2014. The Committee is expected to consider award winners and award amounts at the March meeting and may also make decisions at that meeting. Consistent with the availability of these funds, the awards will be distributed no later than June 30, 2015.

Q9: How long will award recipients have to use the funds?

A9: While an award is a one-time allocation from the state, funds may be spent over multiple years.

Q10: May one campus submit multiple applications?

A10: A campus may submit one or more applications as the coordinating institution and/or participate in one or more applications. However, campuses need not submit multiple applications simply to highlight different types of strategies or changes, as multiple approaches can be described in a single application. Staff anticipate that campuses describing multiple strategies likely will submit single, comprehensive applications to increase their competitiveness. Ultimately, applicants should decide for themselves whether submitting more than one application is more appropriate given their particular circumstances or will make them more competitive for an award.

Q11: Has the Committee specified restrictions related to line spacing in a submitted application?

A11: The Committee has not specified restrictions related to line spacing. Single spacing and double spacing are acceptable.

Q12: If a community college is part of a district that includes multiple colleges, should the coordinating institution be the district or the college?

A12: As specified in the application package, the coordinating institution must be a UC campus, a CSU campus, or a community college. Therefore, the community college, not the district, should coordinate the application. Other community colleges in that district may participate in the application if desired.

Q13: Can you be more specific about the program's third priority—to ease transfer through the state's education system by better recognizing learning that occurs across the state's education segments and elsewhere?

A13: The state's priorities are established in the statute funding the program, and the statute does not offer more specificity. When discussing the program, the Committee generally has interpreted the state's priorities broadly, so staff anticipate that a variety of activities would be considered appropriate for meeting the third priority, such as efforts to strengthen and streamline pathways between K-12 schools, community colleges, four-year colleges and universities, and others; improve the sharing of information across segments; and provide more opportunities for students to earn credit toward their degrees for knowledge and skills gained outside of the traditional classroom. The recording of the September 16, 2014, Committee meeting may provide further insight about the Committee's interpretation of the scope of the program. The recording is available at http://www.dof.ca.gov/innovationawards/.

Q14: Who is the Committee's staff, and what is the background of those individuals?

A14: Staff from the Education Systems Unit of the state's Department of Finance serve as staff to the Committee. These individuals have experience in policy and fiscal analysis of education issues, particularly with regard to funding for higher education.

Q15: Will Committee staff make the names of the institutions that submit notices of intent available to the public?

Staff intends to post a list of institutions that have submitted notices of intent on the program website after October 31, 2014.

Q16: Item 3 in the application asks applicants to describe key policies, practices, and/or systems in place prior to January 10, 2014, that were initiated to achieve the goals identified in Item 1 of the application. For purposes of inclusion in the application, are there any limitations with regard to how far in the past policies, practices, and/or systems were initiated?

A16: The item does not limit applicants to describing policies, practices, and/or systems that were initiated after a particular point in time. As the item specifies, the initiation of these policies, practices, and/or systems should be consistent with the applicant's setting of particular goals related to the state's priorities, as described in the applicant's response to Item 1.

Q17: With regard to the first priority—significantly increase the number of bachelor's degrees awarded—will the Committee be looking at strategies to increase recruitment to higher education institutions, or will the Committee expect applicants to discuss strategies to increase the retention of students enrolled in these institutions?

A17: The Committee is open to any changes that can be expected to achieve the state's priorities, as articulated above, which could include recruitment and retention strategies, among others. An applicant is expected to indicate how the changes described in the application will help achieve the state's priorities.

Q18: Item 6 of the application asks applicants to discuss how the changes described in the application will impact the average cost to award a bachelor's degree. Is the Committee expecting applicants to use a particular methodology or calculation to determine this impact?

A18: The application package does not specify a particular methodology or calculation that applicants should use. A strong application will demonstrate an understanding of how the changes an applicant describes will affect the average cost per bachelor's degree awarded and present credible evidence that the innovations are likely to reduce that cost.

Q19: Item 5 asks applicants to describe changes they plan to implement after January 9, 2015. Given that applicants may intend to undertake new changes in the future using funds that they would receive if they win an award—which they will not know until the spring of 2015─how should an applicant reflect these future innovations?

A19: The innovation awards function like prizes: winners will be selected on the strength of past and present innovations and not on their potential future use of award funds. The purpose of Item 5 is to understand an applicant's vision for continued improvement and innovation in the future, not to determine how the applicant will spend funds if selected for an award. Therefore, applicants are instructed to list only those changes that they plan to implement regardless of whether or not they win an award. Activities that would be contingent upon receipt of award funds should not be included. Furthermore, as stated in Item 10, a strong application will demonstrate that the applicant will implement and sustain the innovations described in the application without new funds from the state or from students.

While winners should not need new funding to implement the particular activities described in their applications, winners may choose to use award funds to expand activities described in their application. Alternatively, winners may also use award funds to carry out activities that are new and different from those described in the application. *(See Q4/A4.)*

Q20: Item 1 asks applicants to describe specific goals and how achieving those goals will advance the program's priorities. How would an applicant reflect the fact that their goals have changed over time in response to successes or failures of previous efforts?

A20: An applicant could choose to describe any changes in its goals in its narrative response to Item 1, which asks for a description of when and how its existing goals were developed and are used on an ongoing basis.

Q21: It may be impossible to include all the information that is required in the cover page on a single page, particularly if the application includes numerous participants. Is there a page limit for the cover page?

A21: The cover page may exceed one page if necessary.

Q22: Given that community colleges track transfer rates but not how many transfer students earn a bachelor's degree, would the rate at which students transfer to four-year institutions suffice as evidence of increased number of bachelor's degrees awarded?

A22: In the items in the "Evaluation" section, an applicant is expected to describe how it will evaluate whether the changes achieve the goals described in the application, including at least three specific quantitative measures the applicant will monitor regularly. These items allow applicants to determine the measures that are most relevant to the types of changes described in the application; those measures could include transfer rates. In Item 1 of the application, applicants are asked to identify goals that are aligned with the state's priorities for higher education. Community colleges that have included a goal of improving transfer rates to four-year institutions can explain in the narrative in response to Item 1 how this outcome will help advance one or more of the state priorities.

Q23: In addition to the numeric score for each application that staff will present to the Committee in recommending award winners and award amounts, will staff provide any qualitative analysis of the applications?

A23: The Committee will have access to the full content of all submitted applications. Additionally, staff will provide the Committee with summaries of each application (using the abstracts included in the cover pages of the applications) and numeric scores based on staff evaluations of the applications. It is likely that staff will also include brief qualitative remarks to help the Committee better understand the numeric scores. All of this information will be made available publicly.

Q24: The "Introduction" section of the application package states that the Committee will, in selecting award winners and award amounts, consider a wide variety of innovations, and in particular look for innovations that can be replicated by other institutions, scaled broadly, and have the potential to achieve more equitable outcomes in higher education attainment. How would you define "scaled broadly"?

A24: The Budget Act of 2014 specifies the criteria for selecting awardees, including the degree to which the application includes broad participation by higher education institutions and K-12 education agencies and can be replicated by other campuses and groups. Consistent with this language, broad participation is one way to demonstrate that an innovation is "scaled broadly." The Committee may also make awards to campuses or groups whose innovations the Committee believes can be applied in many other institutions.

Q25: Item 7 of the application package asks applicants to describe any risks or tradeoffs involved in the changes being implemented and to address any potential adverse effects on student groups that are underrepresented in higher education. Could you provide some examples of risks, tradeoffs, or potential adverse effects for changes that may adversely affect underrepresented students?

A25: Risks and tradeoffs would depend on the particular changes described in an application. Applicants might describe potential undesirable consequences of their programmatic decisions—for the institution; students; or other stakeholders, such as faculty—or reasons the innovation might fail. At its first meeting, the Committee also indicated that many important innovations involve risk and do not always work as planned. Item 7 is an opportunity for applicants to acknowledge those risks and show a thoughtful approach to analyzing and mitigating them.